

How to Die to Selfishness

by G.D. Watson

To die to selfishness, we must have a pure motive, habitually accept humiliation and self-abasement, and seek to be child-like and simple in our manners and ways.

Topics: "Self Denial", "Sanctification"

Description

G.D. Watson preaches on the importance of dying to selfishness, emphasizing the need to mortify the deeds of the body through the Spirit and exposing false notions and prerequisites for self-denial. He delves into the principles and benefits of dying to selfishness, highlighting the essence of self-denial in motives and intentions, the significance of daily crosses in deep fellowship with Christ, and the blessings of being crucified with Christ, such as wideness of heart, tenderness, detachment from earthly things, and the deepening of faith through sanctified suffering.

Transcript

1. How to Die to Selfishness

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."--Romans 8:13

Before we can begin to explore the Biblical principles for self-denial, there are some false notions which must be exposed and removed from our thinking.

False Notions of Dying to Self

One false notion is the conceiving of a wrong hatred to ourselves. The more we are divinely illuminated the more minutely and astonishingly do we apprehend the almost infinite blindness, foolishness and meanness of our past lives. Unless we are kept very mellow and subdued, this sight of our meanness may tempt us to form a bitter, revengeful feeling toward ourselves, and under such an impression, we may feel like punishing ourselves in some unnatural way, or by the making of unscriptural and rash vows. This is the source of cruel and unnatural penances.

Another false notion is the choosing of some line of mortification for ourselves, or the selection of some special cross. This will defeat the very end we want to attain, which is the loss of our will in all things. But the very act of choosing a cross for ourselves keeps alive our own preferences and furnishes a secret nourishment to self-will, and furnishes a little place for self to live under the very pretext of dying to self.

Another erroneous view is that we can sink to a deeper death by over work, by engaging ourselves to a heavier task than we can reasonably accomplish. Even if the extra work be of the most religious kind, still it supplies a field for self-activity. It is in this respect that St. Paul speaks of persons under a false zeal, going to every extreme of self-imposed poverty, and even burning at the stake, yet all under the principle of selfcenteredness, and not true self-denial.

Another false notion is that we are to indolently leave ourselves to the mere law of development, and if we can only be kept from well-defined sins, we are not to tax ourselves with anything deeply spiritual but leave ourselves to grow without a diligent attention to growth. This is the opposite error from some of the foregoing. It is to be feared that this last error is the one that most persons drift into.

Prerequisite Principles for Dying to Selfishness

But now let us face the real question, how to die to selfishness, and more realizing Christ as our all and all. In the first place, do we really believe this is attainable? Have we looked at the blessed Christ until we have obtained a clear conception of what it is to walk in union with Him? Have our spiritual eyes surveyed this blessed possibility, until our steady mortification of sin has become a settled conviction with us (Rom 8:13)? Then have we calmly, deeply, irreversibly settled it that we should tolerate no selfishness in our lives and focus all on Christ? Are we prepared to make that the motto of our lives? Do we think it and pray it until it becomes a steady, all-prevailing passion in our minds, none of selfishness and all of Christ?

As we tread this golden shore, let us go slow and walk softly on these shining sands. Let us not launch out in those fathomless waters without duly counting the cost and without ample ballast in our ships. If we have determined to mortify selfishness in consistent dependence upon God, let us remember that the first step is to have a pure motive. That motive must be nothing less than sustained communion with the ever blessed triune God Himself; that is, it must be the seeking of God as our all and in all (Col 3:11), our last end, our exceeding great reward (Gen 15:1)--so that it will be for His glory and praise, through us, and by us, and that our only desire to serve is as a channel for His work, a chosen vessel for Christ, and the manifestation of His glorious attributes in us.

The essence of self-denial lies in the motives and intentions, hence this all-consuming motive to live for Christ. With this pure motive fixed in the heart, we are to habitually and willingly accept of every occasion for humiliation and self-abasement, which God's providence brings to us. While on the one hand we are neither to make or seek a cross, on the other hand we are to sweetly and willingly accept of every blow, or mortification, or inconvenience, or painful annoyance, which comes to us in the order of God's providential will.

Principles for Dying to Selfishness

Humiliation is the very quintessence of the Christian life, and we must appreciate every opportunity of walking in humility. Hence when reproaches, unkind treatment, poverty, loneliness, persecution, mental distresses, seeming failure in our work, disappointments, deep perplexities, or any disagreeable thing comes to us, we are to calmly face these things, as appropriate occasions for self-denial. We see the omnipotence of God rule over us in our circumstances. We can thereby in these humiliations more clearly manifest the character of Christ and walk in the will of God.

Another effectual principle for self-denial is to be exceedingly careful not to receive human honors or praise into our hearts. If we are worthy of having enemies, who will seek opportunities of humiliating us,

we will also have some friends who will love and honor us. As a rule, the more bitter our enemies are, the stronger our friends will love us, and there will be times when we will be honored in spite of ourselves. But if we open our hearts to receive this honor and in our thoughts feed upon it as a social honey, or if we allow human praise to inflate our thoughts, it will instantly breed a human self-esteem, and this becomes a hot-bed of the self-righteous pride.

It requires great humiliation and divine reconciliation for evangelists, preachers, teachers, and singers, and writers, not to stumble and fall at this point.

Another principle for the death of selfishness is to seek in everything to be child-like, and extremely simple in our manners, words, dress, tastes, and interior experiences. Self naturally feeds on complexity and things grand and large and loud. Christ is the very embodiment of divine and eternal simplicity. The more we become selfless, the more we become disappointing to the people. Our learning, or talents will not show off to such fine advantage. We talk less. We live more quietly. Our labors are less ostentatious. We do more hard fighting with fewer dress-parades. We employ prayer and faith in God more than showy methods. We love to live like God, a profound hidden life, in which people think we don't amount to very much. This is one of the tests for forsaking selfishness.

Another principle for self-denial is to thoughtfully avoid making our religious life an unnecessary burden, or cross, or tax, to our families and loved ones. Sometimes those who want to be real Christ-like, for lack of wisdom, adopt some mode of life, or devotion, or theory of sanctity, which is a source of positive peevishness and disagreeableness to those with whom they live. This is exactly opposite to Christ, and feeds self instead of killing it. We should seek to be yielding, and pliant, obliging and accommodating.

In all non-essentials, where a well defined principle of right is not involved, we must surrender our little choices and tastes and ease, for the well pleasing and gratification of others. To be rigid and stubborn on nonessentials is simply self-righteousness and a stronghold of self.

Lastly, in everything we are to seek nothing for our own selfish purposes, and seek rather the will of God in everything we think and do. This is to become a daily habit of our motives and intentions, to distrust our fleshly impulses, to ignore human wisdom, to look to the Scriptures for the most minute guidance in all things (2Ti 3:16).

2. The Daily Cross

"Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."--Mark 8:34

It is only when we are daily crucified to the carnal nature that we can bear our daily cross in the true spirit of our Master. It is by the denial or death of sinful selfishness that we enter the state of perfect obedience in which the daily trials and crosses can be borne in deep fellowship with Jesus. The very order of the words our Saviour uses, indicates principles for our daily experience. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Here we have:

- first, an attitude of crucifixion of the carnal nature, the mortification of the flesh;
- then the enlightened soul bearing its daily sufferings and hindrances by faith,
- which brings it into a better sustained fellowship with Christ.

It is this daily cross which assists in our practical sanctification, according to our love of obedience for the glory of God.

What Is the Daily Cross?

What is our daily cross? It is that one or more things which are unavoidable in our lives, and which produce suffering of body or mind or heart. It is that thing which in our poor judgment seems to hinder the easy flow of our religious life. Sometimes our cross may be composed of a combination of things, but as a general rule, it is some one instrument or cause of suffering to the soul. Were there no suffering of some kind involved, then there could be no cross at all, for the only thing in a cross is its pain. The outward form of the daily cross may change with years, or the same cross may continue till death; but in some form it abides. It is as impossible for the true saint not to have some cross as it is to walk in the sunshine without having shadow. The Holy Ghost gives us to understand plainly that the multitudes of jolly, ease-loving, and easy-going religionists, who bear no daily suffering with Jesus, are only sectarian-born religious bastards, and not really kingdom-born souls (Heb 12:8).

It is your daily cross that makes you weep more than any other thing; that sends you to frequent prayer; that leads you to ransack the promises; that makes you cry out, like Jesus, "Father, why is this?" that causes you to reach out to the everlasting arms which sustain you (Deu 33:27); that makes you sick of the world and selfishness; that gives you longings for heaven. Oh, precious old homely, daily cross, what deep and far-reaching effects thou hast wrought through all these prayer-paved years!

A False Conception

There is an hallucination about getting free from our daily cross which needs to be broken; it is a daydream worked up in our minds, a beautiful vision that hangs just ahead of us, that some day we will be rid of our cross, that we will have no painful annoyances, and then our feet can fly unimpeded toward heaven. Alas! that so many saints should get their eyes set on this will-o'-the-wisp dream. If you want deep communion with Jesus Christ, getting rid of your cross is the very thing to defeat you. There is a better victory than freedom from the daily instrument of pain, and that is to grow in spiritual fellowship with Christ, where every trial can be borne in the same spirit that Jesus bore trials. Boundless love is the condition for triumphant bearing of our daily cross. When our cross has driven us to center our lives on Christ, and we are kept aware of His presence and power, then the cross will have proved its own balsam. Every trial will be a victory in the walk of faith, and a testimony of the Gospel to all around us.

To love the cross is understood by only a few Christians. People fancy it means loving the cross on which Christ died. No; it means loving that very cross in our lives that drives us into deep oneness with Christ; it is to meekly, patiently, lovingly embrace the very principle of self-denial. It is often the case that devout Romanists wear hair-cloth and iron or knotted cords next to their skin. All that is too superficial; it does not enter deep enough. Jesus did no such foolish thing. To bear our daily trial as Jesus did, we must bear it meekly and quietly as unto God, and not to man.

Daily Trials

How long it takes to accept our daily trials as a gift direct from the hands of our Lord! His eyes are on us; He notices our inner feelings, thoughts, and choices, as to our cross. The spirit in which we bear our trials here will mark the grade of our standing in the world to come. It is by persevering prayer that we get on the sunny side of every sorrow, and on the triumphant side of every trial.

It is the sharp grain of sand cutting its way into the oyster that is enveloped with the life-juices of the creature and turned into a pearl; so our daily cross, cutting its way into our life's core by being folded round and round with many tears and loving prayers, becomes in our souls the very pearl of Christ-likeness, and more valuable than all our own chosen blessings. The Holy Ghost can reveal to us the very disposition in which Jesus bore His daily trials, and when we bear ours in the same spirit, then indeed do we have fellowship with Him.

If it does not please our Father to remove our trials, it is because He wants us to seek and receive an overflow of tender love that will bear us on over the trials and in spite of them. Love for Christ is the only true victory over trial. Intense love for Jesus is the only water that can make our thorny cross ripen its fruit; so do not cut down your cross, but water it with more love and prayer, and wait for its golden apples.

3. Benefits of Being Crucified with Christ

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."--Galatians 2:20

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."--Galatians 6:14

The word crucifixion, as it applies to us in a Christian sense, may be defined as any pain or suffering which mortifies sin and selfishness, and breaks the hold which things of time and sense have upon us. There may be many kinds of sorrow and suffering which do not serve the purpose of true crucifixion.

Suffering

In order that suffering may be a thorough mortification to us, it must be seen as the will of God for us. When we entrust ourselves to God, and trust His charge of every particle of our life and circumstances, it is then that we more confidently see His omnipotence working in all our trials and sufferings for our good (Rom 8:28-29).

It does not matter what the occasion of the suffering may be. It may come from our own sins, or poverty, or ill-health, or loss of friends, or separations, or terrible and protracted temptations or assaults of evil spirits, or the hatred of others, or great disappointment, or divine chastisements; it may come from many of these sources; but let it come from any cause in the universe, if we give it over entirely into the hands of God, and entrust ourselves to His will, with a perfect desire for Him to work His best will in us, He will make every pain, every groan, every tear, every particle of our suffering, work in us a death to sin and to selfishness, and to all things on earth which will be for our highest perfection and for His glory.

Degree of Walking by Faith

The effectual working of the Holy Spirit in every person depends exactly on the degree of their walking by faith (2Co 5:7). One consequence of not walking by faith is grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30). There is a divine mystery in suffering which increases our faith. There is a supernatural power in it, which has never been fathomed by human reason alone. There never has been known great saintliness of soul which did not pass through great suffering. When we suffer so severe and so long, and can still thank God in the midst of it, then it has wrought its blessed ministry; then patience does its maturing work (Jam 1:4); then our cross of suffering begins to weave itself into a crown.

Our affections are then better weaned from all creatures and all things; they love nothing but God's will in any given thing; they have no private ends to serve; they have no motives except to please God. Things do not offend us so easily; they do not hinder us so much. Let circumstances be what they may, we still seek God's will. We know based on the authority of God's Word that God is making everything in the universe, good or bad, past or present, work together for our good (Rom 8:28-29).

Resulting Blessings

Among great blessings resulting from sanctified suffering, is that it gives a great wideness to the heart, and a universality of love. This mortification of selfishness widens the narrowness of the mind; it gives an immensity to the sympathies, and a great love for our God. This immensity of heart desires to reach out to all nations with Gospel; it is absolutely free from all bigotry, or caste, or natural prejudice, or political partisanship, or sectarian feeling. It is emphatically a citizen of heaven; it takes as much interest in the kingdom of God in one place as another; it feels as much interest in souls being saved in one denomination or one country as in another.

This may seem strong meat, and many Christians will disagree with these words, but when they reach this condition, they will find the foregoing words perfectly true to their experience. When we reach a more complete mortification of selfishness, we love all creatures with God's love, and as God loves them, up to our measure; it is not so much we that love others, as it is that God loves them through us. We become the channels through which the Holy Spirit flows; He pours His thoughts through our minds, His prayers through our hearts, His choices through our wills. We renew our minds and think more like He thinks (Rom 12:1-2). He breaks away all the banks and boundaries of our narrow education, or creed, or theology, or nationality, or race, and manifests Christ-likeness in us.

Another great benefit of maturing through suffering, is an inexpressible tenderness. It is Christ-like tenderness filling the thoughts, the feelings, the manners, the words, the tones of the voice. Everything hard, bitter, severe, critical, flinty, has been broken; there is a contrite spirit (Psa 34:18). Great sufferers are noted for their quiet gentleness. As we approach them, it is like going to a tropical climate in mid-winter; the very air around them seems mellow; their slow, quiet words are like the gentle ripple of summer seas on the sand; their soft, pathetic eyes put a hush upon our rudeness or loudness of voice.

There are many earnest Christians who have not crucified the flesh. Their tongues rattle so much, their spirit is dictatorial or harsh, they measure other people by themselves; there is something in their constitution which seems to need the grinding into fine flour. It is well worth God-ordained suffering, if thereby God transforms us into tenderness and sweetness of spirit, which is the very atmosphere of heaven. This kind of tenderness cannot be voluntarily put on; it cannot come from training; neither is it a transitory sweetness, which is like a spring day intruding itself into winter; but it is that fixed and all-pervading gentleness of spirit which is like the fixed climate of the Torrid zone. It is the finest outgrowth of the mortification of sinful flesh.

Detachment from Earthly Things

Another benefit of self-denial is the detachment from all earthy things which it produces. The mind has a thousand-fold attachment to the things in this world, which it is not aware of until they are ground to pieces by suffering. Did you ever notice how your soul stretches itself out into ten thousand things of earth and time, and how the fingers of your thoughts grasp thousands of things! Just look at your mind; for every friend you have on earth, there is a distinct attachment; for every piece of property you own on earth, there

is a distinct attachment; for the ten thousand recollections in your bygone life, there is a particular sentiment or attachment; for all the scenes of earth and associations of time, there is an attachment; and besides all these outward things, look at that vast, invisible world within your own self--your own desires, and hopes, and dreams, and prospects, and gratifications for your self, your family, your church, your nation, your particular party; see how you have become attached to your own thoughts, until your heart seems to have a million springs to it which flow round and round countless objects in this world!

These things are not only those which are positively wicked, nor those which are stigmatized as sinful; but things which Christian people recognize as innocent, and yet in a thousand ways they hinder us and bind us to the earth (Heb 12:1). Suffering will untie us, and loosen every cord that sinfully binds us to our foes or friends--to all our possessions, to all the things of the past, to all attractive sights and sounds--and give us such inward liberty from everything on earth so that heaven is very near. We see that we are citizens of the New Jerusalem a hundred times more powerfully than that we are the citizens of any earthly city or country. We believe we have "come to an innumerable company of angels, and the Church of the first-born, and the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23). The coming of the Lord is so real to us, our whole being is pervaded with the attractive powers of the world to come. The Holy Spirit fills us exactly in proportion as our selfish desires for the affairs of earth are mortified (Eph 5:18). Nothing so well contributes to mortification of sin as suffering. It is in this way that God turns our mourning into abiding joy (Psa 30:11).

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gd-watson/how-to-die-to-selfishness/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net

